



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

V.

SECRET MISSIONS TO SAN DOMINGO.

IN response to reiterated urgent appeals from the Republic of San Domingo for recognition by the United States Government and for protection against the attacks of its next neighbor, the Republic of Hayti, President Polk's Cabinet in the spring of 1846 resolved to send out an agent who should report upon the condition of the Dominican Republic socially, industrially, and politically, its naval and military forces, and the real value of certain privileges which the Dominicans were willing to accord to the Government and citizens of the United States. This honorable commission having been intrusted to me, I in April sailed from Pensacola in the United States brig Porpoise, and on May 6th we dropped anchor off the ancient city of San Domingo. The commander of the Porpoise, Lieutenant Hunt, fired a salute in honor of the Dominican flag, and soon we were boarded by a ragged officer from the castle, who came to borrow the powder necessary for a response.

Our first duty was to pay a visit to the President, General Pedro Santanna, a light mulatto about forty years of age, who received us in his shirt-sleeves, with a bandana handkerchief bound round his head, nor did he appear to be in the least disconcerted by the splendor of our uniforms.

Only a few years before, San Domingo had been visited by Mr. Hogan, who, like myself, had been sent to report on the state of the country, and President Santanna was much surprised that our Government should now send another commissioner on the same errand. However, his Excellency promised to give me every facility for traveling over the island, and regretted the inability of his Government to bear the expense ; "but," said he, "we have no money."

Indeed, the Dominican finances were in a deplorable condition. The small amount of specie in the country was in the hands of Jews. The currency consisted of paper and copper tokens, and twenty

paper dollars were equivalent to one in silver. Whenever the Government wished to pay off its debts, it would raise the price of copper coin. Directly afterward copper would fall and paper would be in the ascendant. Those speculators who were informed of the secrets of the Treasury made money by both of these operations, but the mass of the people were always sufferers. Everywhere were to be seen evidences of the abject poverty to which the people were reduced ; their once flourishing commerce had been annihilated ; education was a farce ; and even the ceremonial of their religion had fallen into neglect.

Horses were needed for my proposed expedition, but with the best endeavors I only succeeded in procuring five sorry beasts, not over forty-four inches in height—in fact, not much larger than good-sized mastiffs. The price paid for these animals was, in appearance, exorbitantly high—twenty-five hundred dollars currency for the lot—and the transaction reminded me of the stories told of our grandfathers going to market with a basketful of Continental money. One of my horses was burdened with the currency requisite to pay my daily expenses. I had thousands in one-dollar notes, each the size of a sheet of commercial note-paper. But this large sum, when reduced to its real value, amounted only to seven hundred and twenty-five Spanish dollars, which, however, I found to be in excess of my wants ; and I was even enabled to indulge in all the luxuries afforded by the wayside inns—bananas, yams, ginger, tea, and occasionally an egg.

A detailed account of my peregrinations through the Dominican Republic would be instructive, while many of the ludicrous incidents would require the humor of a Mark Twain to do them justice ; but my space is limited, and I can deal only in generalities.

From its historical associations the city of San Domingo is one of the most interesting in the New World, and Irving and other writers have invested it and its surroundings with an air of romance. But, for those who see it in its present condition, unless their imaginative faculty is strongly developed, the romance appears to have vanished.

The great cathedral, commenced in 1514 by Diego Columbus, in which the ashes of the great navigator once rested, still remains, besides ten or twelve churches and chapels ; and the ruins of the Jesuit College, of the palace of Diego Columbus, and of the convent of San Francisco, to this day attest their former grandeur.

The outer walls of the city are a fine specimen of Spanish engi-

neering, though allowed to go to ruin, and the sea-wall, with its once imposing line of guns, must have bidden defiance in the olden time to many a hostile squadron, though it could not resist the attack of Drake, who nearly destroyed it in 1586.

Good houses are few and far between, the streets are ill paved and hardly safe after nightfall, and the people, sunk in poverty, are only interesting from the humility with which they bear their misfortunes. So much for the city of to-day.

The harbor of Osima, once the emporium of an important commerce with Spain, now has not water enough to admit a ship of war, and is accessible only to very small merchant vessels.

Before leaving the city for the interior, I received the following communication from the Dominican Secretary of State, who did all in his power to facilitate my investigations :

SANTO DOMINGO, May 14, 1846.

SIR : I have received your note of the 14th inst., in which you request a passport to travel through the interior of our republic. . . .

My government not only is disposed to grant the passport you have solicited, but also charges me to perform whatsoever you may esteem necessary to the success of your enterprise; and accordingly we offer you a guide to accompany you. . . .

As one of the objects of your Government is to inform themselves of the disposition of this Government and people with respect to friendly and commercial relations between the two countries, the undersigned is authorized to inform you that, inasmuch as this Government has no other desire than to see the advancement of the country in the path of civilization, they will neglect no means compatible with the national honor to obtain the closest relations with all civilized people, and above all with those who, on account of their physical position and their political institutions, are apparently destined to form only one family; and as regards the people you can judge from your own observation their good feelings and their morality.

God preserve you many years!

[Signed]

RICARDO MIURA.

To D. D. PORTER, Commissioner from the Government of the United States.

On the 15th of May, 1846, I left the historical city of San Domingo, accompanied by an officer of the Government as guide, as far as the town of Azua, and a muleteer to take care of my animals, and with the prospect of hearing nothing from home until I arrived at Porto Plata, on the north side of the island, where the Porpoise was to call for me in one month's time in case I did not join her earlier at Samana Bay.

There was a very small specimen of a newspaper published in

the city, but no post to carry it through the country, and therefore I was not likely to be much edified by the press, whose motto might well have been, "Here no one writes because no one reads, and no one reads because no one writes." In fact, to all intents and purposes, I was penetrating an unknown region, where nothing from the outside world would be likely to reach me even at the stopping-places on my route.

Once outside the city walls, I plunged into a wild, uncultivated country, dotted with the ruins of once flourishing *haciendas* which attested the wealth and magnificence of the old *hidalgos*. Here the followers of Columbus and their descendants had lived in luxury and state, but now there was nothing to mark the site of their once splendid abodes but shapeless heaps of stones.

A few miles from the city we crossed the Hayni and the Nigua Rivers, two small streams. In one of them we saw two mulatto boys washing out gold—the only sign of human life visible in the country around. Their gleanings for the day amounted in value to perhaps twenty-five cents, but it was *gold*, and with them that was a paramount consideration, for this mixed Spanish race seem to inherit the mania for the precious metals from their Castilian progenitors.

Along the banks of these rivers fluttered flocks of birds of gorgeous plumage, and numerous wild fowl swam so near our horses as we forded the streams that I could have shot them with my pistol, for the natives having no guns do not molest them, and birds of all kinds are consequently quite tame.

The few people residing along the road were negroes of the lower order, who lounged at the entrances to their reed huts, too indolent to cultivate the fertile soil on which they dwelt.

Yams and bananas were supplied by nature ; each family possessed a few pigs, a goat or two afforded them milk, the bread-fruit tree furnished shade and the staff of life, and the flower of the fruit-tree material for mattresses. The people were cleanly in person and courteous in manner, and with Spanish hyperbole "placed everything they owned in the world at our disposal" ; but the performance did by no means square with the profession.

Toward evening we reached San Christoval, twenty-five miles from San Domingo. I rode up to the quarters of the commanding officer of the troops of the district, an ancient negro, to whom I delivered my circular letter of introduction from President Sannatta.

The General scrutinized the document very carefully, examined the seal a dozen times, and at length shouted lustily for his secretary, Don José Brune, who rushed on the scene in a state of undress befitting the climate, followed by the regiment of six soldiers and the sentry on guard.

The whole command now strove in vain to decipher the letter, and after an hour had passed the document was stuck in the sentry's hat-band, while the General disappeared to take his *siesta*.

I took possession of his front room, and was soon fast asleep in my hammock, closely watched by the sentry, the first duty, no doubt, that he had performed for an indefinite period.

The old General was, no doubt, much put out by my coming, because it interfered with the trial of a lawsuit which he had taken out of the hands of an *alcalde*. The subject of litigation was a trespass committed by a poor old donkey, and, from what I saw of the mode of meting out justice by the military authorities on the occasion, I concluded that Coke and his precedents would be considered superfluous in this part of the world.

At daylight next morning, I started to visit the mines of San Christoval, twenty-six miles from the town. After a brisk ride of five hours we reached a settlement called Tabblasso, where I was hospitably entertained by the natives. Wandering rather incautiously into the forest, I was attacked by five dogs, and so roughly used by them that it was three days before I was able to travel, my wounds being in the mean time dressed with leaves and roots from the woods, according to the medical system of the people.

These dogs afford one of the principal means of livelihood for the natives in the interior of San Domingo, who depend largely upon the flesh of the wild boar for food. I was present at one boar-hunt near Tabblasso, where forty dogs overcame a huge boar with tusks as sharp as knives. The animal squealed as lustily as any other of the pig family, and I knew from sad experience exactly how he felt.

It took five hours of hard riding to bring us to the mine of San Christoval. This is the only copper mine I visited while on the island, though I passed near several others of note. All these mines are reputed to be of great value. That of San Christoval possesses ore veins of considerable extent, and from seven to fourteen feet in thickness, which yield to the blowpipe from thirty to forty per cent. of pure copper. Gold has been found in the copper in sufficient quantity, it is asserted, to pay for working the mines. The only mode of transporting the product to San Domingo

(twenty-five miles distant) would be by panniers on the backs of mules.

The copper mine in the mountain of Maimon is spoken of as the finest in the Antilles—the ore yielding from forty to eighty per cent. of pure copper, and there are many other mines of this metal in good repute ; in fact, the island is filled with minerals.

It was with regret that I bade adieu to the little valley of Tablассo, and, after a ride of eleven hours over a parched but fertile country, I reached Bani, fifty-five miles distant. The population of this district of San Christoval was, as near as I could ascertain, 7,000 souls, 3,960 of whom were women. One third of the population might pass for white, a somewhat larger proportion were mulattoes, and the remainder negroes of the most pronounced type, whom all authorities agreed in declaring to be anything but a blessing to the country.

Some of the so-called whites are the proprietors of vast estates, extending from the seacoast on the south side to the river Yuna, comprising rich alluvial soil, covered with the choicest woods of the tropics, and valuable mineral lands. This land could have been bought at an average price of one cent an acre, and dear enough it was at that when we consider that it was constantly liable to the hostile incursions of the negroes from the west end of the island.

The road over which I was now passing had shortly before been traversed by a Dominican army, who consumed nearly everything eatable on the route, so that we began to suffer greatly for want of food ; but we could get water, and occasionally a few bananas, and so we managed to ward off starvation until we arrived at Azua, on the 24th of May, after eight days of the hardest riding I ever experienced.

We passed through several pleasant villages on the way—Bani, with a hundred inhabitants ; Paya, with three hundred ; and several times crossed the beautiful Nisao River. All this country is famous for its dye-woods, and its mahogany is the finest in the world ; but quantities of these valuable products are going to decay for want of means to convey them to the coast.

On reaching Azua our first care was to get something to eat, our next to purchase a new supply of horses, for the old set were worn out, not having been properly attended to by my worthless mulatto muleteer, who merited and would have received a sound threshing at my hands, had such a proceeding comported with the dignity of a United States commissioner.

The village of Azua is beautifully situated in the bight of the great bay of Neyles, in whose harbors the navies of the world might ride. A large trade in mahogany is carried on at this place, and the surrounding country has many fine plantations, producing sugar-cane, bananas, etc.

From Azua I traveled westward for some days, but, finding that my natives were breaking down under the difficulties of the road, I returned on my course, and took the path from Azua across the mountains of Maniel, which rise 2,000 feet above the sea, and which were supposed to be impassable for horses. I made the entire march over these mountains on foot, literally working my passage, for in some instances the horses had to be hoisted over declivities. If there was any road, our guide would not show it, for the Dominicans look upon the Maniel range as their Gibraltar, in case they should be overcome at all other places by the Haytiens. In fact, a Leonidas would not require more than his three hundred to hold these heights against a mighty army. Five hundred Haytiens once tried to force the passage, and were slaughtered almost to a man.

The village of Maniel is situated on a fertile plateau of many thousand acres, producing every article of commerce to be found in the island, and, from its height above the sea, enjoying a delightful climate, averaging in the month of May 75° at noon, and not over 60° Fahr. at night. Here the people lived in perfect comfort, and in as high a grade of civilization as is usually to be found in the interior of a West India Island, or as could be expected where there is an almost total lack of education.

After a sojourn of three days at this secluded place, I started on the 30th of May to go up, up, up, over the *Lomas Kemados*. The painful and toilsome journey over these hills—a feat seldom attempted by white men, and dreaded by the hardest natives—I shall never forget. In three days I had accomplished the task, crossing the Banilejos, a rapid stream, fifty-six times in a heavy rainstorm. My horses were under water a dozen times, and once we were carried over the rapids and had to swim for our lives. The river-bed was the only road, and we had often to pass from one side to the other to avoid deep water, and to obtain a footing for the horses. Such is traveling in San Domingo.

My fiat currency got extremely wet, in common with everything else; so I halted at a deserted hut in the forest, and spread it out to dry, to the amazement of flocks of paroquets, which hopped about and seemed astonished at the sight of so much wealth.

The country through which I then was toiling is as much a *terra incognita* to-day as it was three centuries ago. The native who is compelled to force his way through these wilds gladly bids adieu to the gloomy forests when once he has left them behind, nor does he trouble his head about their resources. The wealth in these hills is, however, illimitable, the fertility of the valleys unsurpassed, and thousands might here enjoy a degree of luxury unknown to the greater portion of mankind. Oranges, plantains, bananas, coffee, cocoa, all grow wild. The cotton-bush, yielding cotton of the nanking tint so much prized in China, is frequently met with. There are over forty different trees producing woods fit for furniture and joiner-work, and coal crops out at many points from the hillsides. All that is needed is American energy and industry.

It would be tedious to recount all the difficulties and dangers I met in the mountains, but I finally reached the valley of the river Maimon late at night, and took up my quarters in a hut inhabited by fourteen negroes, who gave me space to swing my hammock.

On awaking next morning I found to my horror that I had been sleeping in a hut inhabited by lepers, and, although I had had nothing substantial to eat for twenty-four hours, I rushed out of the hovel, and, calling to my muleteer to follow with the animals, I swam across the river in my haste to get as far from the frightful disease as possible.

After I had gone ten miles I was overtaken by one of the negroes whom I had so unceremoniously quitted. He brought me my gold watch, which in the hurry of my departure I had left hanging on a nail in the hut; which proves that a man may be a leper and yet be honest.

The next day, after a toilsome ride, I reached the gold mines of Maimon, which I had come a good deal out of my way to examine.

I saw no evidence that these mines had ever been worked except by digging into the sides of the mountain, the depth of the excavations in no case exceeding ten feet, by a width of twenty feet. There were no shafts sunk and no machinery, and I could learn nothing on the spot concerning the former yield or the history of the mine, although there were marvelous reports of the amount that had been realized here; *when* no one could say.

No doubt in the first settlement of the island the Spaniards extracted a considerable quantity of gold from these mines by pressing the poor Indians into service and working them to death. The work must have been of the crudest kind—mere surface-digging—

yet we are informed that single masses of ore, one containing \$3,600 worth of gold, another \$4,280 worth, and many smaller specimens, were sent to Europe. It is asserted that during the administration of the Spaniards the yield of gold from two mines in the department of Buenaventura amounted to \$1,150,000 yearly ; but the mines of San Domingo have doubtless never been fairly worked, and would yield more to systematic and scientific exploitation than the Spaniards ever realized by their crude and wasteful methods. Of the other gold mines of the island I can give no account. They are mentioned by the various historians ; and Charlevoix, in particular, declares that several districts of the island abound in gold and silver, and indeed minerals of all kinds, which is doubtless the fact, as we may infer from the geological formation of the country.

I have seen quantities of coal cropping out of the ground, and iron mines enough to supply the West Indies if they could be made accessible.

At the house of the proprietor of the gold mines, who is at the same time the owner of large estates on the Maimon River, with herds of cattle and every comfort in life, I obtained the first substantial meal I had eaten since leaving the city of San Domingo. After partaking of this feast I pursued my journey, along the banks of the Maimon until I branched off on the road to Cotuy, through one of the loveliest countries I ever beheld, and struck the Yuna River, which disengages into the gulf of Samana after innumerable windings through rich valleys, including the district of La Vega, known to the Spaniards as the garden-spot of the island. With little labor this river could be cleared of its obstructions, and small steamers and flatboats could transport to the sea the immense quantities of coffee, sugar, cotton, mahogany, copper, etc., which the region should produce, and a city would spring up in the gulf of Samana equal to any in the West Indies.

I lingered as long as possible on the banks of this beautiful river, swinging my hammock at night under the wide-spreading mango-trees, and lulled to sleep by the murmuring waters. The banks of the Yuna abound in flowering plants that would set a botanist wild with delight, while flocks of paroquets, with their cheery notes, help to dispel the gloom of solitude.

Sickness may be said to be unknown in this part of the country, as the prevailing breeze from the mountains seems to bring health upon its wings. What a climate for our invalids to visit !

Herds of cattle were frequently seen standing in the river shal-

lows. White Guinea fowl would fly over our heads by the hundred, with a whirr like the sound of a hurricane, and, as they alighted at a distance, much resembled snow-flakes driven by the wind. I have seen at least a thousand of these birds feeding together on the border of the forest.

One night I slung my hammock in a schoolhouse at Cotuy, receiving the hospitality of the master—who had no scholars—and, though the accommodations were of the rudest description, the place seemed delightful after what I had just passed through—a ride of sixty miles on a sorry horse.

Next morning I was aroused by a tumult outside my lodgings, and, springing from my hammock, I was confronted by a throng of citizens, headed by the *cura*, who charged me with being a spy, and demanded to see my passports. I soon quieted the suspicions of these worthy people in a speech of the purest Castilian, and my eloquence pleased them so much that they presented me with some yams and bananas, and, when I departed, escorted me some distance from their town. In fact, the people everywhere, when informed of my official character and the purport of my visit, treated me with the greatest kindness and consideration.

It must not be supposed that I merely followed the highways in my journeyings. I started always on my day's march at 4 A. M., and generally averaged about two and a half miles an hour up to 4 P. M.; but, after a long day's ride and an hour's rest and refreshment, I frequently mounted a fresh horse and scoured the country for miles around, guided by the natives, who were anxious to show me everything, until the approach of night reminded me that I must retrace my steps. In my travels there were few of the towns and villages of the Dominican Republic that I did not visit, and I took the census of every settlement through which I passed.

From Cotuy my course was through the beautiful district of La Vega, so graphically described by Irving as the land of the Cacique Guarionex, who lived here with his tribe on a soil unsurpassed in fertility, from which they derived substantial treasures; while the purblind Spanish adventurers, heedless of all wealth except the precious metals, wasted their lives in seeking rich placers and golden streams, and starved in the midst of plenty.

As I traveled toward the gulf of Samana I sometimes followed the course of the Yuna, and sometimes crossed ranges of hills seven or eight hundred feet in height, sloping into beautiful valleys watered by the tributaries of the Yuna. That river, by the time

it reaches Samana Gulf, becomes quite a respectable stream, navigable for small vessels for some distance into the interior.

Before I had arrived within sight of the gulf of Samana, two of my horses had died of exhaustion, and the rest were completely broken down. As for myself, what with swimming rapid streams, plunging through forests, falling among rocks, etc., my clothes were all in rags, and my limbs so swollen as to give me constant pain, and I had to wrap my feet in rawhide like the natives.

It was absolutely necessary to retrace our steps, and after a toilsome journey I reached the little town of Maccoris, whence after recruiting and obtaining fresh horses I pushed on to Santiago, a pretty town of five thousand inhabitants, eighty miles from Porto Plata. From Santiago I traveled more than two hundred miles to different points in the La Vega district. Having finished this reconnaissance, I judged that I had accomplished the object of my mission, and had examined the country.

The third day after my arrival at Santiago I came across a number of "Galignani's Messenger," and read there an account of the opening of hostilities between the United States and Mexico, and the death of my brother, killed while searching for the body of Colonel Cross.

I purchased the best horse to be procured, and next day set out for Porto Plata, eighty miles distant, which I reached in eighteen hours, stopping but twice on the road to refresh myself and horse.

I arrived at Porto Plata on the 13th of June, one day later than the time appointed, having been constantly in the saddle over some of the roughest roads one can imagine, and having averaged nearly thirty miles a day, equal to eight hundred and seventy miles, with at least two hundred and fifty miles of *détours* additional.

On my return home in the Porpoise from Porto Plata, I made a full report in duplicate—one for the State and the other for the Navy Department—but both of these disappeared from the departments prior to the breaking out of our civil war in 1861.

During President Pierce's Administration, an officer of engineers was sent to the gulf of Samana in the frigate Raritan to examine into its adaptability for a naval depot and its capacity for defense.

Mr. Jefferson Davis, the then Secretary of War, being a man of large views, no doubt saw the necessity to this country in the future of such a naval depot as the gulf of Samana, or he may have had other ideas which it is unnecessary now to surmise.

Soon after the Southern Confederacy assumed the form of a government, and began to fit out vessels to prey upon our commerce, we had to prepare a set of fast cruisers to meet these privateers, for they could scarcely be termed ships of war ; and, as the Sumter was seizing our vessels in the West Indies, cruisers were sent in that direction.

While Confederate vessels were allowed to obtain coal and provisions in all the West India ports and to sail when it suited their convenience, our ships met with vexatious delays, and, if a Confederate vessel was in port, we were not allowed to sail until the enemy had been gone twenty-four hours, during which time the latter might destroy a million dollars' worth of property.

I know how this system worked, for I chased the Sumter in a slow, old ship, for ten thousand miles, never being off her track, and always arriving in port a few hours after her departure.

Had I not been detained purposely at every port but one where I coaled, I should have captured the Sumter at Para, where I arrived twenty hours after she sailed.

There was a great sympathy everywhere for this Sumter, due probably to the prodigality with which the officers threw money about, but probably also it was due to the feeling which always exists in favor of the weaker party. This feeling was worth more to the Confederates than tons of coal and miles of speed.

St. Thomas was the only port in the West Indies where we were received on an equal footing with the Confederates ; in fact, the sympathy seemed there to be in our favor, if I could judge by the alacrity with which the necessary supplies were furnished to us, enabling us to pursue the Sumter without loss of time.

The difficulties our ships encountered and the losses sustained by our citizens in the West Indies engaged the serious attention of the distinguished statesman who managed our foreign affairs during the civil war with such consummate ability. After the fall of the Confederacy, it occurred to Mr. Seward that the island of St. Thomas would be of great value to the United States in time of war as a naval depot where our vessels could procure coal and provisions without returning home.

I had the honor to enjoy the confidence of Mr. Seward, and he consulted with me on this subject. I prepared the necessary charts and obtained all the requisite information to enable our Government to treat for the purchase of the island. When the matter was arranged, Mr. Seward requested me to go out in a ship of war and take

possession of the new territory on behalf of the United States, but that duty I persuaded him to assign to Rear-Admiral Palmer.

Congress readily voted the money for the purchase, and, had it not been for the terrible earthquake which occurred just at that moment and put an end to the negotiations, St. Thomas and all the contiguous islands would have been ours.

Admiral Palmer's flagship was driven on shore by the mighty wave which rolled into the harbor of St. Thomas ; houses were thrown down, hillsides rent, and the wharves submerged ; even the character of the bottom of the harbor was changed ; and it was concluded that St. Thomas would be of no use to us. Mr. Seward, therefore, receded from the inchoate bargain just as a man declines to pay for a horse which tumbles in a fit while he is negotiating its purchase. The Danish Government found no fault with our action, although naturally disappointed at not receiving the money, which was of more value to them than their far-distant colony.

Shortly afterward the Swedish Government offered to the United States the island of St. Bartholomew, about a hundred miles to the windward of St. Thomas, almost as a free gift, with the proviso that a few old pensioners should be supported during their lives. After a full inquiry Mr. Seward declined the offer. St. Bartholomew has no ports, and vessels lying in the open roadstead could be easily destroyed by ships lying off the island.

Mr. Seward was, however, bent upon obtaining in the West Indies a port of refuge for our ships of war and merchant vessels, and of all harbors in that quarter the gulf of Samana appeared to be in every respect the most eligible place for the purpose. It commands the Mona Passage, through which all American and European commerce passes on its way to the Caribbean Sea, Honduras, coast of Mexico, etc. The gulf and its harbors are perfectly healthy, with north winds and sea-breezes the year round. Then if we could obtain the isthmus of Samana we should have entire control of a considerable extent of country and all the harbors on the north side of the gulf. Besides this, the Dominicans wanted us to have the place, and to manage the affairs of the island.

As soon as Mr. Seward saw his way clear, he determined to send his son, the Hon. Frederick W. Seward, Assistant Secretary of State, and myself as Commissioners to purchase or lease the gulf of Samana, together with the adjacent territory.

In December, 1866, we embarked at Annapolis, Maryland, on board the U. S. S. *Gettysburg*, with full instructions and a large amount of

hard cash. A few minutes after leaving the dock the pilot ran the ship hard and fast on an oyster-bank ; the wind came out strongly from the north, and in a few hours a man could walk all around her. I therefore telegraphed for the U. S. steamer Don, into which my passengers were transferred, and we got along well enough until off Cape Hatteras ; there we encountered a terrific gale, which tore the ship almost to pieces and blew one of her masts over the side, where the iron rigging fouling the propeller rendered the Don almost a wreck. We managed to get back to Hampton Roads, and, meeting the Gettysburg coming down the bay, Mr. Seward and myself again embarked in her ; and, after a series of mishaps sufficient to dampen the ardor of the most enthusiastic diplomat, we cast anchor off the city of San Domingo.

We at once opened negotiations with the Dominican authorities, giving them to understand that we had gold enough on board to redeem all their elastic currency. We told them that we wanted the gulf of Samana, including every harbor and all the isthmus, with such rights in the adjacent country as would insure the United States against any interference from the Dominican Government. In fact, we wanted all the Dominicans were willing to let us have.

I am sorry to say that our mission was unsuccessful, though we were treated with the greatest courtesy ; and, when we shook the dust of the island off our feet and departed, tears stood in the eyes of the administration at the thought of so much specie being carried away which ought to have belonged to them.

The obstacle in the way of our success seemed to be the fact that the Government of San Domingo had just emerged from a revolution, and a powerful party in the country was bitterly hostile to it. There were still many predatory bands that had not laid down their arms ; therefore the Dominican Government, although greatly in need of money, and desirous to have us for neighbors, did not dare to accept our proposition. We had no authority to offer the Government protection from foreign or domestic violence, and we could advance no money until the territory of Samana was made over absolutely to the United States. Mr. Seward, senior, was greatly disappointed, but never gave up the hope of finally accomplishing his purpose.

In his project of acquiring territory in the West Indies he was fully sustained by many of his old colleagues in the Senate, to whom, no doubt, he had confided his views. Even Mr. Sumner, who so opposed the San Domingo idea of President Grant, ap-

proved Mr. Seward's plan. Other statesmen, too, who had favored the purchase of St. Thomas, Samana, and Alaska, under the lead of Mr. Seward, afterward took opposite ground, for reasons which were doubtless satisfactory to themselves.

President Grant was not slow in following Mr. Seward's initiative, and in endeavoring to obtain possession of the gulf of Samana. He fully understood its value as a naval and military station, and earnestly desired its acquisition ; besides, the President of the Dominican Republic had laid before our Administration the advantages such a cession of territory would be not only to the United States but to his own country, which sadly needed money, and had no particular use for Samana.

My readers will doubtless recollect the bitter opposition President Grant encountered in his patriotic desire to secure for this country a cession of territory that would be invaluable to us in case of war with a naval power, an opposition that could not be justified on reasonable grounds, but was to the last degree unwise, as, from my knowledge of the island and sentiments of the inhabitants, I am certain that it must necessarily become in the future a territory of the United States, unless, in contempt of the Monroe doctrine, we suffer it to fall into the clutches of some European power.

I have merely glanced at what ought to be an interesting subject to the people of the United States. A detailed account of the climate, resources, exports, natural history, etc., of San Domingo, would set young America to thinking on the matter of acquiring a foothold in the gulf of Samana.

DAVID D. PORTER.